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PUBERAL HYGIENE IN RELATION TO PEDAGOGY AND SOCIOLOGY.¹

FROM the beginning of puberty, which is marked by the rapid increasing of stature, the growth of genital organs, and the first appearance of sexual hair, to its full development in youth of both sexes, which is marked by the changes in voice, the growth of beard in man and the full development of the breast in the maid, and the other changes in physical condition and moral character, is a period of many years. It is not far from truth to affirm that in our climates we should estimate the duration of this period at from five to six years in the girl, and from eight to ten in the boy. Now, it is not indifferent to the welfare of individuals and of society to determine the manner in which during this whole period young people should conduct themselves in relation to the increasing activity of reproductive functions. Sexual impulses usually appear early in this period, and the healthier the conditions of youth, the earlier generally grows genital activity. But its free satisfaction, though grateful to the senses, is not equally useful to health and welfare. It is a general law that rules all the organic world that every progress in the development of a quality, of a function, or of an organ cannot take place without a regress, without inhibition in other properties, organs, or functions. We can say that all organic life is founded upon this law. Even in moral life we remark the same thing. The first lesson that a boy receives at school, says Lander Brunton, is a lesson of inhibition; he is taught to sit silent and to hold back the movements that exterior impressions, acting upon his excitable nervous system, urge him to make.

All education rests on this principle; the continuation and the amplification of this lesson ought to lead the boy to restrain his ardent desires, to subdue his temperament, to do his duty, however disagreeable it may be.

¹See article of DR. A. MARRO, *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY*, September, 1899.

The inhibition of cortical excito-motor centers, to whose hyper-activity is due the great restlessness of apes and idiots, goes to favor perceptive and ideative centers. Genius itself thrives, many times, only at the expense of health and bodily strength, and manhood reaches its height only by the sacrifice of the dearest joys of life.

In the case of Goethe the composition of each one of his great works was followed by an illness. Voltaire said that he never was glad but for a moment, and the ardent desire of perfection tormented him so that he exclaimed that he would die without having made a work according to his taste.

A law so general could not spare a function of such importance as the generative one. From sexual excesses, even in full virility, one notes, with the deterioration of character, the loss of many virtues. Despotism finds in this vice the best condition for their support. The Jesuits of the missions of Paraguay, in order to keep the Indians in servitude, had the bells rung at midnight to awake them from their sleep and invite them to propagation.¹

When the body of the youth is still increasing, even the simple awakening to activity of such a function as the generative one, accompanied with so much loss of nervous force and noble materials, though so enticing to the unresisting youthful soul, must inevitably be hurtful to the complete development of the physical, as well as of the moral, organism.

Man satisfies sexual impulses in two ways, by self-abuse or by natural intercourse. Self-abuse is most common in early youth because of the greater ease of indulgence. It is true that the evils of onanism have been exaggerated. However, I cannot agree with Havelock Ellis when he makes Tissot, Voltaire, Lallemand, and Bicher blameworthy for exaggerating the evil effects of vice, and for doing not a little damage by arousing excessive fears and groundless remorse in sensitive consciences.

It is chiefly by means of such books that the tradition of the evil of that vice has been developed, and has thus prevented so many consequences of an abuse which without them would have

¹ D'AZARA, *Voyage à l'Amérique méridionale*, p. 9.

been far greater. The vice imposes itself, of course, with greater violence and more hurtful consequences on children already stained by degenerative vice, but it is also true that predisposition receives from this vice a strong impulse to enter into activity.

The alienist and neurologist is more than anyone else in a situation to recognize and measure daily the immense sum of physical and moral misery which comes to youth from self-abuse. Apart from degradation of genital organs with spermatorrhea in the boy, leucorrhœa in the girl, disposition to phthisic and to other illnesses which mostly arise from this vice, there is a sequel of moral and social inconveniences. It is a matter of fact that impairment of sexual organs brings with it a degrading influence upon the moral character. The boy becomes bashful, especially in presence of female individuals, loses frankness, cannot look in the eyes of other people, becomes timid, without courage and boldness. Inclination and skill for physical exercises, as well as study, vanish. Disposition to idleness and to strange fancies arises, and while an ill-founded self-esteem increases, the individual grows suspicious, unfriendly, and inclined to judge censoriously the demeanor of everybody toward himself.

Less dangerous for the physical welfare, if dangers of syphilitic or venereal infection are avoided, but not less noxious to individuals and to society, is the natural satisfaction of sexual impulses in early youth. The greater difficulty of indulging in it renders its abuse less easy, and its use has not such a deteriorating influence upon the character as onanism, but other inconveniences arise. The first is, of course, the exposure to syphilitic or venereal infections in roving loves. It is a matter of fact that precocious nuptial sexual intercourse becomes noxious as well to individuals as to their descendants. We observe in mankind what happens among beasts. The sheep, observes Burdach, remains ordinarily sickly and slender when it is coupled before the third year, and the horses remain small and weak which are coupled at the age of three years. The same may be said of cows, goats, sows, etc. Physically imperfect are the animals born from such precocious unions. Courrasons reckons among the principal causes of the diminishing stature and general

strength of modern Germans, in comparison with the old ones, the earlier sexual intercourse.

Too early indulgence in sexual pleasures has besides a deteriorating influence upon the moral character, which cannot enjoy its regular evolution.

At the first awakening of love in the boy, his sweetheart appears to him as a divine being fit to be adored, and for whom he fancies he could make every sacrifice, even that of his life; the least thought of possession would be driven from him as a profanation. It is only later that sexual desires make themselves known, and that the woman is wished as an object of amusement. It is from such elaboration of sentiment that social virtues draw their origin and that the character comes to perfection. If possession comes too early, without the preceding period of courting and unselfish love, the young man becomes a mere dissolute, cruel, and profligate being, who seeks nothing but luxury and gratifications. The excitations which affect the central nervous system from generative organs in activity of development, instead of being collected in tonic power to awaken and support the young man in the performance of his duties and the acquirement of the qualities which would make him agreeable to his beloved, come to arouse the atavistic dispositions to violence and fight, either in the struggles against rivals or in the purchase of means to ingratiate himself with the woman. Thence come the violent criminality from one side, and the crimes of theft and rapine from the other, when a suitable education in the first age could lead the young men to substitute for violence the methods of the civilized man, instead of cheating either parents or strangers.

It is therefore to be desired that young people grow without indulging in sexual pleasures till they have reached their full development in the physical as well as in the moral organism, and one ought to employ all means suggested by a modernized hygiene, in order to hinder the too early awakening of sexual stimulus. The means recommended to attain such an aim are of different kinds, and one can say that sexual hygiene extends itself over the whole life of the youth, to the food as well as

clothes, to physical exercises as to mental application, rest, amusements, and society, besides the care that should be directly given to the organs of generation.

As to the food, it is necessary that it should provide for the necessities of the increasing body and for the great consumption of hydrocarbonaceous substances which takes place in the youth. It must also richly provide salt for the skeleton, albumen for the muscles, and fat or hydrocarbonaceous substances for the consumption of respiration and muscular exercises. Bread, milk, and a moderate quantity of meat are wanted, and fruits for the sugar and salts that they hold and for the refreshment they give. One must, on the contrary, avoid too many eggs, and still more venison, aromas, truffles, drugs, and all other such alimentary substances, which have the tendency to excite the sexual organs. One must also avoid for young people coffee and alcoholic drinks, which have the bad effect of exaggerating the dispositions, already natural in such an age, to excitement of the nervous and circulatory systems. Clothes must not be too tight, so that the generative organs be not subject to friction during the movements of the body, nor so warm as to excite them. The bed itself ought not to be too soft and the bedclothes not too heavy.

Young people must, as a general rule, go early to bed and rise early. "Tous les masturbateurs se lèvent tard, et quand chez un adolescent sans aucune cause légitime on voit se développer une tendance à rester au lit jusqu'à une heure avancée, on a le droit de concevoir des soupçons," writes Ball;¹ and Payot replies: "Tout jeune homme qui demeure au lit une ou plusieurs heures après le réveil est fatalement vicieux."²

Work is against that, as well as against many other dangers, a great talisman. We must, however, always keep in mind the peculiar condition of youth, the reduced power of resistance caused by the rapid increase of stature and by the development of muscular masses and of the whole organism, so that either physical or mental effort can easily occasion fatigue and impair the health of youth.

¹ *Maladies mentales.*

L'éducation de la volonté.

We must, therefore, seek to arrange that the work of young people be done in conditions which avoid the pains of fatigue, and further the elimination of the waste which work creates in the tissues.

Every sthenic emotion seems to enjoy the immediate reward of such virtue: music, song, praise, emulation, self-love, sense of independence, and sexual emotion itself. The little song with which seamen accompany the weighing of the anchor helps to give to their efforts simultaneity as well as intensity of action.

Alexander the Macedonian felt himself greatly excited with courage when Timotheus played the lute. I knew a lady who after a walk a few hours long was taken by a paraplegia which could be cured only after many months of care. Under a double emotion, the sexual and the musical, it happened that the same lady recovered; and we see young damsels and boys dancing during many nights without feeling any degree of fatigue. Lycurgus let the maids play before young men in order to stimulate them in their exercises. Jesuits in Paraguay let music accompany the Indians in their daily work in order to render it tolerable and agreeable (D'Azara). Emulation works so strongly upon young men that it is sometimes necessary to restrain them, rather than to push them to obey its impulsion. I have seen young men coming to insanity from the strain of mental work done in order to surpass their school-fellows.

Very strong in youth is the love of independence. Battell, who lived many years among the Giagas of Benguela, relates that they put a collar on the boys of twelve or thirteen years, as an emblem of servitude, which they must wear till they could show the head of an enemy killed by them. The young men defy every danger with the utmost courage in order to be delivered from such a mark and in order to receive the honor of being declared members of society.

An immediate reward is the best means of training children of irregular conduct in reformative houses to regular work. So we see in Italy Martini's and Garaventa's institutions.

The great attraction of games and sports issues from the immediate recompense that one expects from them. To these,

as well as to every physical exercise, one must pay attention in youth. From our present point of view we should counsel avoiding among physical exercises those which bring with themselves a prolonged friction of generative organs, as climbing, descending along ropes, sliding with extended body upon the bars of the staircase.

In climbing trees it is useful to bring the most strain upon the soles of the feet set against the trunk of the tree, so that, the greatest pressure being in this direction, the danger is avoided of pressure against the thighs.

Swimming, on the contrary, is to be recommended for the refreshment that accompanies the exercise.

A still greater attention must be paid to mental occupation. Extremely delicate for the education of youth is the estimate of the notions that young people must have of sexual functions and the degree of attention they come to pay to them. Where thought runs, there innervation is awakened and the blood flows more fully. Such an excitement brought upon generative organs awakens them earlier to activity, and with greater frequency and impulsion than is useful for the physical and moral conservation of young people.

Among the Romans, in the presence of the young men who still wore the *toga praetexta*, it was forbidden to speak freely of things referring to the sexes. We know that the senator Manlius was condemned for having kissed his wife in presence of his daughter.

Licentious books, speeches, and paintings must be banished from youth, and every unchaste spectacle, as so many springs of corruption; and we may give heed to Horace when he says:

 Saepius irritant animos demissa per aures
 Quam quae sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus, et quae
 Ipse sibi tradet spectator.

The counsel already given not to let young people stay late in bed in the morning finds its reason in this last condition.

On the other side, it must be acknowledged that the mystery with which sexual organs and functions are surrounded exercises upon the attention of youth not a small attraction. So great is

the importance of sexual functions upon the future of youth of both sexes that it may not be convenient to leave them in ignorance of what concerns them. It is the duty of parents, and of those who take their place, to put them upon their guard against the perils that threaten them. Kaan¹ suggests with that purpose to begin with study of sexual organs and sexual functions in vegetables. The physiological notions acquired in that manner are of such a nature as to awaken the desire of learning, rather than that of curiosity.

In my opinion, hygienical thoughts ought to influence constantly the mind of youth in regard to everything which concerns sex, and form the daily habits of young men and women.

Young people should not be permitted to stay alone and give themselves over to building castles in the air. The first danger of such a habit lies in the improper formation of mental operations. Building castles in the air deteriorates itself the regular mental process of making associations. Ideas are not joined together by their real affinity, judgment does not come to rule them, and the determining power that brings action fails to be evoked to accomplish the mental process; or, if evoked, it acts in a perverse manner.

The next danger lies in the improper direction that mental operations take when not guided to a distinct aim. By fanciful connections between impressions and images, those which possess certain qualities impose themselves upon the others, and the mind runs easily to thoughts that find their origin in the unconscious excitement coming from sexual organs in their course of development and in their rising activity; and this is to be avoided for several reasons.

To these dangers we must join the unfavorable influence which solitude and taciturnity exert upon the character of youth. Solitude and taciturnity are, as a rule, noxious to youth, and they ought to inspire such an apprehension in those who superintend young people in relation to their moral welfare, as dislike of food or of movement inspire in regard to physical welfare.

¹ *Psychopathia sexualis*.

All extravagances, all immoral and antisocial impulses, find a favorable soil ; subjective life overbears the objective ; the circuit of ideas becomes narrower, judgment is easily troubled, the development of affections is hindered, and their prolonged suppression provokes sudden and fearful explosions. Such conditions during youth are the most favorable for the rising of irregular characters, whence come the political madmen, as well as the religious ones, the lunatics of every kind, and dangerous criminals.

A little while ago I was called, within the very short time of eight days, to assist as an expert in two lawsuits over great blood-crimes perpetrated by two young men who were declared by all witnesses always to have been before the crime good, laborious, and mild characters, but taciturn and solitary. One of them slew a comrade with nineteen stabs with a knife. The other killed a maid of whom he had become enamored, and who had been refused to him by her parents. He laid wait for her, and fired at her two gunshots, then inflicted on her sixteen wounds with a knife, of which nine were judged mortal.

All the modes of care just mentioned have their own value, and those who are charged with the education of youth must never forget to have recourse to them ; yet it must be avowed that they are seldom sufficient to check genital impulsions, when awakened in an age in which the excitations are strongly felt and the power of ruling them is still but partially developed.

All moral counsels, warnings, threatenings, punishments, and appeals to the sentiment of personal dignity have little power against the temptation of the enticing sensations. Against the allurements of early roving loves Gowdin proposed as the best means the early betrothal of the young men, relying upon the affection that comes to unite the betrothed. But I believe that we cannot yield too much confidence in this as well as in all other moral means to hinder youth from indulging in sexual delights. Recourse to physiological means, that may rule the development of sexual impulses, is far more reliable. Most important among them is the action of temperature. There is a very strict relation between heat and sexual tendencies.

In hot climates puberty is precocious, and the rise of erotic impulse is early and strong. The menstruation of maids in Asia Minor, Arabia, Egypt, and Abyssinia begins at eight or ten years, and so in India, where the religious laws allow the maids to marry at eight years of age. In South America Indian girls at eight or ten years are married (D'Azara). Artificial heat acts in the same manner as natural heat. In Russia, where the peasants sleep with their families near the stoves, exposed to very high temperatures, and where everyone, from the sovereign to the humblest peasant, takes almost once or twice a week his hot steam-bath, men and women are united in marriage at the same early age as those who are born under the sky of Hindoostan. The same happens with the Samoyedes, the Ostics, the Tacontas, the Kamtschadales, and the Eskimos, who are even still more precocious. Even in individuals great sexual activity is generally accompanied with great internal heat. Among the most incorrigible masturbators that I had in the asylum, one could not support during the whole winter any woollen bedclothes, but only a thin cotton coverlet; the other passed quite bare-breasted through the winter without catching the least cold.

Another consequence of great heat is that the more precocious is puberty, so the more precocious is exhaustion. Young oriental men who at the thirteenth year have sexual intercourse at the thirtieth are already worn out, and must have recourse to aphrodisiacal remedies in order to accomplish conjugal duties, while their wives cease at this epoch to menstruate and to bear children, and quite lose their beauty. Cold, on the contrary, is the great check and preserver of sexual activeness. In cold climates and upon the mountains puberty arrives very late, and the customs are generally more austere. The more the body is exposed to cold, the greater is the delay in the development of sexual tendencies. Among the ancient Germans, even at the time of the Romans, though clothes had been imported from the latter, the underaged boys were naked even in winter, while men wore the doublet and bedecked themselves with the second bark of the trees; and we know by the relations of Cæsar and of Tacitus that the venery of young men was late, so that it was

ignominious to know the woman before the age of twenty years. Puberty, on the contrary, was long protracted. The German girls, whose nakedness scandalized the Romans, were not anxious to lose their virginal flower.

Extremely praised were the young men who kept their chastity till late, because they reached a higher stature and became stronger and more vigorous; and so strong-limbed grew also the Hollanders, equally accustomed from boyhood to inclemency of weather and to go quite naked till puberty, even in the most rigid cold.

In Sparta, under the laws of Lycurgus, the girls, who could not marry till their body had reached its full development, wore only a short sleeveless tunic opened at the sides, that did not cover the knees. This roused the raillery of the Athenians. The boys at twelve years exchanged the *toga* for the short *pallium*, slept on straw or upon hay without coverlet, and when fifteen years old slept on reeds.

From these convincing facts we can infer the suitable means of delaying the puberal development in its sexual impulsive manifestations. The habits of our social life, the manner of clothing and of spending a great part of the daytime in close and warm surroundings in winter, conspire with many other causes to render puberty precocious. It is necessary to avoid such causes of disturbance. Gymnastics in the open air ought in youth to be invoked more than the thickness of clothes to keep the body warm. And with gymnastics should be employed the hardening of the body, such as one can obtain from daily cold hydrotherapeutic applications, either general or partial, to the genital parts and the neighboring region. I secured excellent success with cold hip-baths daily repeated in the cases of many incorrigible masturbators of our asylum, when all other means had proved unsuccessful. The hip-bath was repeated four times a day, and lasted from one to five minutes each time. In three cases the success was wonderful. After the first week, and in one instance after the third day of hip-baths, the inspection of bed-linen cloths showed that nightly masturbation had ceased, while the overseers informed me that during the daytime the sick young men forbore vicious

practices. The first case was already incurable, and the second was a criminal insane person with whom the resistance of the vice was more tenacious and did not yield until after thirty-six days of hip-baths, which he took very willingly, though in the winter season, and he prolonged them beyond the fixed time.

By means of cold thus daily many times applied we can efficaciously check the precocious venereal impulses. Common hygiene recommends the washing of the genito-anal region on the ground of cleanliness. It is a counsel of sexual hygiene that the washings in the puberal age should be cold and daily repeated as many times as one obeys the natural wants.

From such a habit followed for many years by the women I found absolute immunity from leucorrhea, and a virginity of the senses up to a very ripe youth.

The benefit of cool applications against sexual impulses was already known by the ancients. Galenus in his book *De sanitate tuenda* notes how a pedagogue of the athletes had applied to the loins of one of them lead plates "ut nocturnis veneris imaginibus careret," and adds that with the same remedy he had healed a man of the same trouble. Plinius, too, in his *Natural History* mentions such virtue of the lead plates, which so applied are capable "frigidiore natura impetus veneris inhibere."

It is therefore logical that the youths from such cold applications might succeed in securing the physical resistance and more suitable economical conditions to satisfy their reproductive instinct, with the advantage of a delayed, but powerful and lasting, virility. By this same means can the woman find a safeguard to keep untainted her modesty, even when the appetite of the sex is strongly felt.

When the impulses are more strong and unrestrained, as in individuals of vicious heredity, the cold hip-bath, sufficiently repeated, promises to check them better than all counsels or exhortation and mechanical means employed to hinder them. This method of temporarily checking venereal impulses by means

of cold is, in my opinion, of the utmost importance for the welfare of youth. Other applications of cold are not so powerful to the end, nor so harmless. In many seminaries and cloisters they seek to keep the surroundings cool, especially the dormitories, and provide light bed-cover so as to avoid arousing venereal impulses; but this method, while far less efficacious, is not without danger. Because the heating power and the strength of resistance that issue from an active life, such as was that of German and Spartan youth, always in movement and in continual gymnastics in the open air, are widely different from those developed in young men or women vowed to ecclesiastical or monastic life, in whom sedentary habits and asceticism tend to inhibit rather than to sustain the natural warmth; so that prolonged exposure to cold acts only to diminish living strength and joins a new depressing influence to the other conditions unfavorable to a vigorous life.

These inconveniences are not to be found in the local applications of cold by means of cold washings and cold immersions suitable to every social condition and both sexes.

The action is exerted upon a limited region of the body, upon the organs of which one wishes to restrain the functional activeness, without stopping their growth and the influence that their development exerts upon the whole organism. At least general health could not be impaired; on the contrary, the absence of immoderate excitations to the central nervous system from the genitals, as well as that of venereal satisfaction, ought certainly to exercise the most favorable influence upon the gradual and full development of physical as well as of moral strength.

It should therefore be, in my opinion, a first rule of hygiene to render so familiar the daily morning cool washing of the pelvis as that of the hands and of the face. Every boarding-school or house for young people of either sex, with educational or other intent, ought to have water-closets so disposed as to allow its inhabitants the opportunity of washing or bathing the parts in a current of cold water. The harmlessness of dressing one's self without wiping the wet parts is proved from Kneipp's

hydrotherapeutic practices, as well as from my experiences on the insane subjected to the cold hip-baths in winter, of whom none felt the least inconveniences in his general health. The employment of special linen being rendered useless, such applications become very much easier, and all danger of transmitting contagious diseases is avoided.

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